



News Release

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Utah Department of Health Upgrades Official Influenza Status to Widespread

(Salt Lake City, UT) – The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) has upgraded Utah's influenza status to "widespread" from "regional" activity. To date, there have been 131 laboratory-confirmed cases reported.

The UDOH tracks influenza (flu) activity by reports of patients diagnosed with influenza (laboratory-confirmed), reports of patients with influenza-like symptoms (not laboratory confirmed), by monitoring absenteeism at schools throughout the state and by monitoring the rates of influenza-like illness at 30 sentinel healthcare clinics. Influenza activity has been reported in all 12 local health districts and absenteeism has been above average in many schools the past two weeks.

Utah's flu season typically runs from November through March, peak levels may occur at anytime during the season, however, the last several years the peak was during the second week in February. The number of cases really started to pick up during the week of February 9 and they remain consistent. The majority of the cases are Type A Influenza. The cases are largely pediatric and center along the Wasatch front. At least 42 of the cases have required hospitalization.

The flu is a contagious respiratory disease. The flu is different from a cold. Influenza usually comes on suddenly and may include these symptoms:

- Fever
- Headache
- Tiredness (can be extreme)
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Nasal congestion
- Body aches

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The flu is spread when a person who has the flu coughs, sneezes, or speaks and sends flu virus into the air, and other people inhale the virus. Influenza may also be spread when a person touches a surface that has flu viruses on it – a door handle, for instance – and then touches his or her nose or mouth. Flu infection usually occurs 1-4 days after an exposure.

Most people who get influenza will recover in one to two weeks, but some people will develop life-threatening complications such as pneumonia. People age 65 years and older, people of any age with chronic medical conditions, and very young children are more likely to get complications from influenza.

You can still protect yourself from the flu by getting a flu shot. Though late in the typical flu season, persons at high risk for serious complications should consider vaccination if they haven't already or if they were vaccinated in September or early October last year because the effectiveness of the vaccine decreases over time. Although flu shots are the best way to prevent the flu, prescription antiviral drugs can also help treat the flu.

Also, hand washing, when done correctly, is an effective way to prevent the spread of influenza. There is more to hand washing than you think! By rubbing your hands vigorously with soapy water, you pull the dirt plus the oily soils free from your skin. The soap lather suspends both the dirt and germs trapped inside and are then washed away.

If you get the flu, you should rest, drink plenty of liquids, avoid using alcohol and tobacco, and take medication to relieve the symptoms of flu. Prescription antiviral medications can reduce the duration of flu by about one day if taken within two days of when symptoms begin. Never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have fever without first speaking to a doctor because giving aspirin to children and teenagers who have influenza can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye syndrome.

For more information about flu vaccinations and where the vaccine is available, call the Utah Immunization Hotline at 1-800-275-0659.

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